

Webster=Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

Author of "Cappy Ricks," "The Valley of the Giants," Etc.

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"What have you been doing lately?" "Borax. Staked a group of claims down in Death valley. Bully ground, Neddy, and I was busted when I located them. Had to borrow money to pay the filing fees and incorporation, and did my own assessment work. Look!" Webster held up his hands, still somewhat grimy and calloused. "The Borax trust knew I was busted, but they never could quite get over the fear that I'd dig up some backing and give them a run—so they bought me out."

"Somebody told me Geary had gone to Rhodesia," Jerome continued musingly, "or maybe it was Capetown. I know he was seen somewhere in South Africa."

"He left the Creek immediately after the conclusion of his trial. Poor boy! That dirty business destroyed the ind and made a tramp of him, I guess. I tell you, Neddy, no two men ever lived who came nearer to loving each other than Billy Geary and his old Jack-pardner. We bucked the marts of men and went to sleep together hungry many a time during our five-year partnership. Why, Bill was like my own boy. Jerome, I curse the day I took that boy out from underground and put him in the assay office to learn the business. How could I know that the Holman gang had echoed the stuff in his shack?"

"Well, it's too bad," Jerome answered dully. He was quite willing that the subject of conversation should be changed. "I'm glad to get the right dope on the boy, anyhow. Have another drink?"

"Not until I read this letter. Now, who the dickens knew I was headed for Denver and the Engineers' club? I didn't tell a soul, and I only arrived this morning."

He turned to the last page to ascertain the identity of his correspondent, and his facial expression ran the gamut from surprise to a joy that was good to see.

John Stuart Webster read it deliberately, after which he sat in silent contemplation of the design of the carpet for fully a minute before reaching for the bell. A servant responded immediately.

"Bring me the time-tables of all roads leading to New Orleans," he ordered, "—also a cable blank."

Webster had reread the letter before the servant returned with the time-tables.

"August, you go out to the desk, like a good fellow, and ask the secretary to arrange for a compartment for me to New Orleans on the Gulf States limited, leaving at 10 o'clock tomorrow night." He handed the servant his card. "Now wait a minute until I write something." He seized the cable blank, helped himself, uninvited, to Neddy Jerome's fountain pen, and wrote:

"William H. Geary, Calle de Concordia No. 19, Buenaventura, Sobrante, C. A."

"Salute, you young jackass! Just received your letter. Cabling thousand for emergency roll first thing tomorrow. Will order machinery. Leaving for New Orleans tomorrow night, to arrive Buenaventura first steamer. Your letter caught me with a hundred thousand. We cut it two ways and take our chances. Keep a light in the window for your old

"JACK PARDNER."

"That's a windy cablegram," Neddy Jerome remarked as the servant bore it away. "Why all this garrulity? A cablegram anywhere generally costs at least a dollar a word."

"That's my delight of a shiny night, in the season of the year," quoted John Stuart Webster; "and why the devil economize when the boy needs cheering up?"

"What boy?"

"Billy Geary."

"Where is he?"

"Central America."

Neddy Jerome was happy. He was in an expansive mood, for he had, with the assistance of a kindly fate, rounded up the one engineer in all the world whom he needed to take charge of the Colorado Consolidated. So he said:

"Well, Jack, just to celebrate the discovery of your old pal, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll O. K. your voucher for the expense of bringing young Geary back to the U. S. A., and when we get him here, it will be up to you to find a snug berth for him with Colorado Consolidated."

"Neddy," said John Stuart Webster, "by my halidom, I love thee. You're a thoughtful, kindly old stick-in-the-mud—"

"No if's nor but's. I'm your boss," Jerome interrupted, and waddled away to telephone the head waiter at his favorite restaurant to reserve a table for two.

Mr. Webster sighed. He disliked exceedingly to disappoint old Neddy, but—He shrank from seeming to think overwell of himself by declining a twenty-five-thousand-dollar-a-year job with the biggest mining company in Colorado, but—

"Forten luck," he soliloquized, "It runs that way for a while, and then it changes, and gets worse!"

When Jerome returned to his seat,

the serious look in Webster's hitherto laughing eyes challenged his immediate attention.

"Neddy," said John Stuart Webster gently, "do you remember my crossing my fingers and saying 'King's X' when you came at me with that proposition of yours? It just breaks my heart to have to decline it, but the fact of the matter is, I think you'd better give that job to your brother after all. At any rate, I'm not going to take it."

"Why?" the amazed Jerome demanded. "Johnny, you're crazy in the head. Of course you'll take it."

For answer Webster handed his friend the letter he had just received. "Read that, old horse, and see if you can't work up a circulation," he suggested.

Jerome adjusted his spectacles and read:

"Calle de Concordia 19, Buenaventura, Sobrante, C. A."

"Dear John: I would address you as 'dear friend John,' did I but possess sufficient courage. In my heart of hearts you are still that, but after three years of silence, due to my stupidity and hardness of heart, it is, perhaps, better to make haste slowly."

"To begin, I should like to be forgiven, on the broad general grounds that I am most almighty sorry for what I went and done! Am I forgiven? I seem to see your friendly old face and hear you answer 'Aye,' and with this load off my chest at last I believe I feel better already."

"Jack, you poor, deluded old piece of white meat, do you think for a moment that I held against you your testimony for the operators in Cripple Creek? I thought you believed the charges and that you testified in a firm belief that I was the guilty man, as all of the circumstantial evidence seemed to indicate. I thought this for three long, meagre years, old friend, and I'm sorry. After that, I suppose there isn't any need for me to say more, except that you are an old fool for not saying you were going to spend your money and your time and reputation trying to put my halo back on straight! I doubt if I was worth it, and you knew that; but let it pass, for we have other fish to fry."

"The nubbin of the matter is this: There is only one good gold mine left in this weary world—and I have it. It's the sweetest wildest I ever struck, and we stand the finest show in the world of starving to death if we tackle it without sufficient capital to go through. It will take at least thirty thousand dollars, and we ought to have double that to play safe. I do not know whether you have, or can raise, sixty cents, but at any rate I am going to put the buck up to you and you can take a look."

"This is a pretty fair country, Jack—if you survive long enough to get used to it. At first you think it's Paradise; then you grow to hate it and know it for hell with the lid off; and finally all your early love for it returns and you become what I am now—a tropical tramp! There is only one social stratum lower than mine, and that's the tropical beachcomber. I am not that—yet; and will not be if my landlady will continue to listen to my blandishments. She is a sweet soul, with a divine disposition, and I am duly grateful."

"I would tell you all about the geography, topography, flora and fauna of Sobrante, but you can ascertain that in detail by consulting any standard encyclopedia. Governmentally the country is similar to its sister republics. It's a cold day indeed when two patriots, two vira's and a couple of old Long Tom Springfield rifles cannot upset the Sobrante apple cart. We haven't had a revolution for nearly six months, but we have hopes."

"I am addressing you at the Engineers' club, in the hope that my letter may reach you there, or perhaps the secretary will know your address and forward it to you. If you are foot-loose and still entertain a lingering regard for your old pal, get busy on this mining concession P. D. Q. Time is the essence of the contract, because I am holding on to the thin edge of nothing, and if we have a change of government I may lose even that. I need you, John Stuart Webster, worse than I need salvation. I enclose you a list of equipment required."

"If you receive this letter and can do anything for me, please cable. If you cannot, please cable anyway. Do let me hear from you, Jack, if only to tell me the old entente cordiale still exists. I know now that I was considerable of a heedless pup a few years ago and overlooked my hand quite regularly, but now that I have a good thing I do not know of anybody with whom I care to share it except your own genial self. Please let me hear from you."

"Affectionately,

"BILLY."

Jerome finished reading this remarkable communication; then with infinite amusement he regarded John Stuart Webster over the tops of his glasses as one who examines a new and interesting species of bug.

"So Billy loves that dear Sobrante,"

he said with abysmal sarcasm. "Jack Webster, listen to a sane man and be guided accordingly. I was in this same little Buenaventura once. I was there for three days, and I wouldn't have been there three minutes if I could have caught a steamer out sooner. Of all the miserable, squallid, worthless, ornery, stinking holes on the face of God's green foot-stool, Sobrante is the worst—if one may judge it by its capital city. Are you going to chase off to this God-forsaken fever-hole at the behest of a lad scarcely out of his swaddling clothes? Jack Webster, surely you aren't going to throw yourself away—give up the sure thing I offer you—to John Billy Geary in Sobrante and finance a wild-cat prospect without a certificate of title attached. Be reasonable. What did you wire that confounded boy?"

"That I was coming."

"Cable him you've changed your mind. We'll send him some money to



"Cable Him You've Changed Your Mind."

come home, and you can give him a good job under you. I'll O. K. the voucher and charge it to your personal expense account."

"That's nice of you, old sport, and I thank you kindly. I'll talk to Billy when I arrive in Buenaventura, and if the prospect doesn't look good to me, I'll argue him out of it and we'll come home. Let me go. I might come back. But I must go. I want to see Billy."

"You just said a minute ago you'd turned the forty-year post," Jerome warned him. "And you're now going to lose a year or two more in which you might better be engaged laying out a foundation of independence for your old age. For Heaven's sake, man, don't be a fool."

"Oh, but I will be a fool," John Stuart Webster answered; and possibly, by this time, the reader has begun to understand the potency of his middle name—the Scotch are notoriously pig-headed, and Mr. Webster had just enough oatmeal in his blood to have come by that center fire name honestly. "And you, you poor old horse, you could not possibly understand why, if you lived to be a million years old."

He got up from his chair to the full height of his six-foot-one, and stretched 190 pounds of bone and muscle.

"And so I shall go to Sobrante and lose all of this all-important money, shall I?" he jeered. "Then by all the gods of the Open Country, I hope I may. Dad burn you, Neddy, I'm not a Methuselah. I want some fun in life. I want to fight and be broke and go hungry and then make money for the love of making it and spending it, and I want to live a long time yet. I want to see the mirage across the sagebrush and hear it whisper: 'Hilber, John Stuart Webster! Hither, you fool, and I'll hornswoggle you again, as in an elder day I hornswoggled you before.'"

Jerome shook his white thatch hopelessly.

"I thought you were a great mining engineer, John," he said sadly, "but you're not. You're a poet. You do not seem to care for money."

"Well," Webster retorted humorously, "it isn't exactly what you might term a ruling passion. I like to make it, but there's more fun spending it. I've made \$100,000, and now I want to go blow it—and I'm going to. Do not try to argue with me. I'm a lunatic and I will have my way. If I didn't go tearing off to Sobrante and join forces with Billy Geary, there to play the game, red or black, I'd feel as if I had done something low and mean and small. The boy's appealed to me, and I have made my answer. If I come back alive but broke, you know in your heart you'll give me the best job you have."

"You win," poor Jerome admitted. "Hold the job open 30 days. At the end of that period I'll give you a definite answer, Neddy."

"I sniff excitement and adventure

and profit in Sobrante and I've just got to look-see. I'm like an old burro staked out knee-deep in alfalfa just now. I won't take kindly to the pack—"

"And like an old burro, you won't be happy until you've sneaked through a hole in the fence to get out into a stubble-field and starve." Jerome swore half-heartedly and promulgated the trite proverb that life is just one blank thing after the other—an inchoate mass of liver and disappointment!

"Do you find it so?" Webster queried sympathetically.

Suspecting that he was being twitted, Jerome looked up sharply, prepared to wither Webster with that glance. But no, the man was absolutely serious; whereupon Jerome realized the futility of further argument and gave John Stuart Webster up for a total loss. Still, he could not help smiling as he reflected how Webster had planned a year of quiet enjoyment and Fate had granted him one brief evening. He marveled that Webster could be so light-hearted and contented under the circumstances.

Webster read his thoughts. "Good-bye, old man," he said, and extended his hand. "Don't worry about me. Allah is always kind to fools, my friend; sorrow is never their portion. In answering Billy's call I have a feeling that I am answering the call of a great adventure."

He did not know how truly he spoke, of course, but if he had, that knowledge would not have changed his answer.

CHAPTER III.

The morning following his decision to play the role of angel to Billy Geary's mining concession in Sobrante, John Stuart Webster, like Mr. Pepps, was up betimes.

Nine o'clock found him in the office of his friend Joe Daingerfeld, of the Bingham engineering works, where, within the hour, he had in his characteristically decisive fashion purchased the machinery for a ten-stamp mill. It was a nice order, and Daingerfeld was delighted.

"This is going to cost you about half your fortune, Jack," he informed Webster when the order was finally made up.

Webster grinned. "You don't suppose I'm chump enough to pay for it now, do you, Joe?" he queried.

"I'm going first to scout the country and in the meantime keep all this stuff in your warehouse until I authorize you by cable to ship, when you can draw on me at sight for the entire invoice with bill of lading attached. If, upon investigation, I find that this mine isn't all my partner thinks it is, I'll cable a cancellation, and you can tear that nice fat order up and forget it."

From Daingerfeld's office Webster went forth to purchase a steamer trunk, his railway ticket and sleeping car reservation—after which he returned to his hotel and set about packing for the journey.

Old Neddy Jerome, as sour and cross as a setting hen, accompanied him in the taxicab to the station, both to let him escape and pleading to the last, in a forlorn hope that Jack Webster's better nature would triumph over his friendship and boyish yearning for adventure. He clung to Webster's arm as they walked slowly down the track and paused at the steps of the car containing the wanderer's reservation, just as a porter, carrying some hand baggage, passed them by, followed by a girl in a green tailor-made suit. As she passed, John Stuart Webster looked fairly into her face, started as if bee-stung, and hastily lifted his hat. The girl briefly returned his scrutiny with sudden interest, decided she did not know him, and reproved him with a glance that even passed old Neddy Jerome did not fail to assimilate.

"Wow, wow!" he murmured. "The next time you try that, Johnny Webster, be sure you're right—"

"Good land o' Goshen, Neddy," Webster replied. "Fry me in bread crumbs, if that isn't the same girl! Let me go, Neddy. Quick! Good-bye, old chap. I'm on my way."

"Nonsense! The train doesn't pull out for seven minutes yet. Who is she, John, and why does she excite you so?"

"Who is she, you ancient horse thief? Why, if I have my way—and I'm certainly going to try to have it—she's the future Mrs. W."

"Alas! Poor Yorick, I knowed him well," Jerome answered. "Take a tip from the old man, John. I've been through the mill and I know. Never marry a girl that can freeze you with a glance. It isn't safe. By the way, what's the fair charmer's name?"

"I've got it down in my memorandum book, but I can't recall it this minute—Spanish name."

"John, my dear boy, be careful," Neddy Jerome counseled. "Stick to your own kind of people—Is this a—er—a nice girl, John?"

"How do I know—I mean, how dare you ask? Of course, she's nice. Can't you see she is? And besides, why should you be so fearful—"

"I'll have you understand, young man, that I have considerable interest in the girl you're going to marry. By the way, where did you first meet this girl? Who introduced you?"

"I haven't met her, and I've never been introduced," Webster complained, and poured forth the tale of his adventure on the train from Death valley. Neddy was very sympathetic.

"Well, no wonder she didn't recognize you when you saluted her to-night," he agreed. "Thought you were another brute of a man trying to make a mash. By thunder, Jack, I'm afraid you made a mistake when you shed

your whiskers and buried your old clothes."

"I don't care what she thinks. I found her. I lost her, and I've found her again; and I'm not going to take any further chances."

The porter, having delivered his charge's baggage in her section, was returning for another tip. Webster reached out and accosted him.

"Henry," he said, "where did you stow that young lady's hand baggage?"

"Lower Six, Car Nine, sah."

"I have a weakness for colored boys who are quick at figures," Webster declared, and dismissed the porter with the gratuity. He turned to Jerome. "Neddy, I feel that I am answering the call to a great adventure," he declared solemnly.

"I know it, Jack. Good-bye, son, and God bless you. If your fit of insanity passes within 90 days, cable me; and if you're broke, stick the Colorado Con. for the cable tolls."

"Good old wagon!" Webster replied affectionately. Then he shook hands and climbed aboard the train. The instant he disappeared in the vestibule, however, Neddy Jerome waddled



"I'm Old Enough to Be Your Father."

rapidly down the track to Car 9, climbed aboard, and made his way to Lower 6. The young lady in the green tailor-made suit was there, looking idly out of the window.

"Young lady," Jerome began, "may I presume to address you for a moment on a matter of great importance to you? Don't be afraid of me, my dear. I'm old enough to be your father, and besides, I'm one of the nicest old men you ever met."

She could not forbear a smile.

"Very well, sir," she replied.

Neddy Jerome produced a pencil and card. "Please write your name on this card," he pleaded, "and I'll telegraph what I want to say to you. There'll be a man coming through this car in a minute, and I don't want him to see me here. Please trust me, young lady."

The young lady did not trust him, however, although she wrote on the card. Jerome thanked her and fled as fast as his fat old legs could carry him. Under the station arch he read the card.

"Henrietta Wilkins," he murmured. "By the gods, one would never suspect a name like that belonged to a face like that. By Jingo, it would be strange if that madman persuaded her to marry him. I hope he does. If I'm any judge of character, Jack Webster won't be cruel enough to chain that vision to Sobrante; and besides, she's liable to make him decide who's most popular with him—Henrietta or Billy Geary. If she does, I'll play Geary to lose. Well! Needs must when the devil drives." And he entered the station telegraph office and commenced to write.

An hour later Miss Dolores Ruey, alias Henrietta Wilkins, was handed this remarkably verbose and truly candid telegram:

"Miss Henrietta Wilkins, Lower 6, Car 9, on board train 24."

"Do you recall the bewhiskered, ragged individual you met on the S. P., L. A. & S. L. train in Death valley ten days ago? He lifted his hat to you tonight, and you almost killed him with a look. It did not occur to him that you would not recognize him disguised as a gentleman, and he lifted his hat on impulse. Do not hold it against him. The sight of you again set his reason tottering on its throne, and he told me his sad story."

"This man, John Stuart Webster, is wealthy, single, forty, fine and crazy as a March hare. He is in love with you. You might do worse than fall in love with him. He is the best mining engineer in the world, and he is now aboard the same train with you, en route to New Orleans, thence to take the steamer to Buenaventura, Sobrante, C. A., where he is to meet another lunatic and finance a hole in the ground. I do not want him to go to Sobrante. If you marry him, he will not. If you do not marry him, you still might arrange to make him listen to reason. If you can induce him to come to work for me within the next 90 days, whether you marry him or not, I will give you \$5,000 the day he reports on the job. Please bear in mind that he does not know I am doing this. If he did, he would kill me, but business is business, and this is a plain business proposition. I am putting you wise, so you will know your power and can exercise it if you care

to earn the money. If not, please forget about it. At any rate, please do me the favor to communicate with me on the subject, if at all interested."

"Edward P. Jerome, President Colorado Consolidated Mines, Ltd., Care Engineers' Club."

The girl read and reread this telegram several times, and presently a slow little smile commenced to creep around the corners of her adorable mouth.

"I believe that amazing old gentleman is absolutely dependable," was the decision at which she ultimately arrived, and calling for a telegraph blank, she wired the old schemer:

"Five thousand not enough money. Make it \$10,000 and I will guarantee to deliver the man within 90 days. I stay on this train to New Orleans."

"HENRIETTA."

That telegram arrived at the Engineers' club about midnight, and pursuant to instructions, the night bar-keeper read it and 'phoned the contents to Neddy Jerome, who promptly telephoned his reply to the telegraph office, and then sat on the edge of his bed, scratching his toes and meditating.

"That's a remarkable young woman," he decided, "and business to her finger tips. Well, I've done my part, and it's now up to Jack Webster to protect himself in the clinches and breakaways."

About daylight a black hand passed Neddy Jerome's reply through the berth curtains to Dolores Ruey. She read:

"Accept. When you deliver the goods, communicate with me and get your money."

"JEROME."

She snuggled back among the pillows and considered the various aspects of this amazing contract which she had undertaken with a perfect stranger. Hour after hour she lay there, thinking over this preposterous situation, and the more she weighed it, the more interesting and attractive the proposition appeared. But one consideration troubled her. How would the unknown knight manage an introduction? Or, if he failed to manage it, how was she to overcome that obstacle?

"Oh, dear," she murmured, "I do hope he's brave."

She need not have worried. Hours before, the object of her thought had settled all that to his own complete satisfaction, and as a consequence was sleeping peacefully and gaining strength for whatever of fortune, good or ill, the morrow might bring forth. (To be continued)

American Buys Franklin Portrait.

A portrait of Benjamin Franklin, painted in Paris in 1778 by Joseph Siffred Duplessis, and showing him as the American ambassador whom Parisians of that period knew, has arrived in this country, the property of Michael Friedsam, the New York Evening Post states. Franklin presented the portrait to the Freres Perier, engineers and owners of the Chaillet fire engine, when he left France, and it was from the Perier family that Mr. Friedsam purchased it this year.

The portrait, whose gorgeous frame of the period is carved in the form of a serpent, is said to be typical of the best work of Duplessis, who was made a member of the academy in 1774, and was later appointed conservator of the museum of Versailles. In Versailles is a street called Duplessis, and a statue of him stands in a public square of the city.

Sea-Island Cotton.

Practically all of the sea-island cotton is produced in the states of Georgia, Florida and South Carolina, the finest coming from the chain of islands off the Carolina coast. It is well named sea-island cotton, as when grown away from the coast the fiber rapidly degenerates into upland cotton unless seed grown in the islands is obtained for planting successive crops.

Learned Her Lesson.

A friend of ours was a collector for a lodge. His little daughter was in the habit of accepting pennies from the members. Her mother chastised her and told her she must not accept pennies any more. So the next day, when one of the members offered her a penny, she said: "I can't take pennies; I can only take nickels and dimes."—Exchange.

The Sewing.

Every harvest looks back to a sowing, every fruit to a seed. Each golden-wheeled October pre-supposes a grain-sowing May; logic, commonplace and inevitable, in conditions material. But humanity is not so inclined to recognize the fact, or to appreciate the meaning of the fact in conditions intellectual, moral, human.—Charles F. Thwing.

Next Morning the Leaves Had Two.

A baker of raisin bread whose product got shyer and shyer or raisins one day received this sarcastic letter: "Herewith I hasten to return a raisin which I found in a loaf bought on your premises this morning. Trusting that you have not been inconvenienced in any way by its temporary loss, I remain, etc."

The Whale as an Eater.

The whale rarely, if ever, swallows anything larger than a herring. Although the head is of enormous size, from one-quarter to one-third length of the body, and the mouth fifteen to twenty feet long and six to eight feet wide, the opening of the gullet is not larger than a man's fist.